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ABSTRACT

In 1973 Florida embarked on an ambitious adventure to improve the quality of public education by decentralizing many aspects of educational decision-making to the school site. The strategy incorporated a comprehensive reform of the state's school finance system, the development of a management information and accounting system, requirements for greater parent and citizen involvement in education, and a relaxation of many state education requirements. The general strategy, labeled school-based management, promotes equal educational opportunity by enabling educators to tailor school programs to the particular educational requirements of individual students. It fosters a more efficient use of funds by ensuring that resources are allocated to activities closely related to the pursuit of local educational objectives. Finally, school-based management is a practical way of administering school programs, given the difficulties of managing classroom activities from district or state offices. Implementation of school-based management has been slowed by the lack of direction from the legislature and the department of education, the absence of a strong political base among Florida educators, confusion about its meaning at all levels of education in Florida, and the lack of a vehicle for encouraging school personnel to make the changes envisioned by the reform strategy. (Author/MLF)

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by

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INTRODUCTION

From 1971-1973 a Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education spent many thousands of hours and thousands of dollars studying the problems of Florida's public schools. The result was over 100 recommendations for improving public education. The major themes of their recommendations were first that education should be individualized as much as possible so that children with different learning problems and learning styles receive education suited to their particular needs. Second, the committee felt that education should be competency based; that is, children should be taught skills necessary for survival and success in adult life. A third theme was that educational renewal requires greater dedication and involvement of the people who are closest to and care the most about children--parents and teachers. Finally, the committee recommended a reform of school management at the place where education occurs, the school building. In particular, the committee believed that the key to a well managed and productive school was a good principal who would be both an educational leader and a good school manager.

Underlying these recommendations was a belief that decisions about public education were being made too far away from the people responsible for educating--particularly classroom teachers--and the children being educated. Many felt that the most pressing problems of public education--poor performance on achievement tests, the lack of discipline, and public dissatisfaction with schools--were related to an explosion of laws and regulations which had over a number of years increasingly centralized the administration of public schools in district and state offices. The Committee's strategy was to reverse the trend toward increasing centralization of school administration by returning many decisions affecting personnel, curriculum,

and the use of resources to the school level. By so doing, the Committee believed that future decisions would be more responsive to the individual needs of school children and more consistent with the individual skills and styles of classroom teachers. They also believed that school based decisions would better reflect the preferences and concerns of local communities within school districts and be more effectively implemented.

In the years following the presentation of the Committee's recommendations, the Florida legislature enacted a number of statutes designed to improve public education in the state. Many of the laws were designed to implement specific recommendations of the Citizens' Committee. Others were only partly related to the Citizens' Committee recommendations, and some directly contravened the intentions of the Committee members.

The purpose of this paper is to assess the impact of the educational reforms initiated by the Citizens' Committee.* Particular attention will be given to school based management, a label given to the overall strategy of educational reform adopted by the Governor's Citizens' Committee. This strategy included an emphasis on the school building as the primary unit of educational management, a new formula for distributing state school aid and parent advisory committees. All three will be discussed briefly. The Florida Educational Finance Program (FEFP) redirected the flow of state dollars to school level programs designed specifically for the children in a particular school. School advisory committees were established to improve educational decision making and to reduce public dissatisfaction with schools by increasing

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*This paper summarizes an evaluation of Florida's educational reforms recently completed for the select Joint Committee on Public Schools of the Florida Legislature. I am indebted to Diana Thomason, Robert Goettel and Miriam Clasby for their substantial contributions to the analyses in the Florida report which are summarized here.

parent and citizen involvement in school decisions. Both the FEFP and school advisory committees are integral parts of the school based management strategy.

SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT

School based management has been unevenly implemented in Florida. Only a few districts have moved to fully decentralize decision making. Most districts are operating much as they have in the past with the exception that they now must budget and allocate funds on the basis of weighted pupils rather than classroom units. A major problem surrounding the implementation of school based management in Florida is that most educators in the state do not know what it is and more importantly do not understand why they are being asked to make major changes in their behavior to implement it.

The Rationale of School Based Management

It is perhaps unfortunate that the name school based management was attached to the proposed reforms of the Citizens' Committee. The label makes it sound like another new management innovation, such as management-by-objectives or zero-based budgeting. The label suggests a set of specific activities or procedures requiring new information and expertise.

In fact, school based management is neither new nor a specific program of activities. School based management is rather an incorporation of many proposals for returning certain decisions to the individual school site. It is an attempt to reverse the trend toward increasing centralization of educational policy making so that those persons closest to school children have more to say about policies affecting those children. School based management is not a new management system, in other words, but rather a fancy name for

attempts to encourage a greater sharing of decision making between central district offices (which in recent years have taken over more of the management of schools) and schools (which in the past made many more of the day-to-day decisions).

In Florida and elsewhere, school based management has been translated into specific activities. Among these are school-centered lump-sum budgeting, allocation of full time equivalent staff positions; parent or citizen school advisory committees; cost accounting at the school level; principal accountability for school budgeting; shared decision making; hiring, assignment, and firing of school personnel at the school level; school-by-school curriculum planning; open enrollment; and school performance reports. Each district or state may emphasize different activities or groups of activities. Underlying all these interpretations of school based management, however, is the belief that education will be improved by moving more educational decisions to the school level.

There are several reasons for this belief. First, school site management gives those who are more familiar with students' problems--principals and teachers--greater responsibility for the education of children. Since the education needs of children in different schools or even in the same school are not always the same, principals and teachers are in the best position to respond to the differences. Second, proponents believe that parent involvement in their children's educations is essential for improving educational quality. The most important contacts between parents and school personnel take place, not at the district level, but at the school site. Parents and students are more interested in their particular school than in the district, and, consequently, they are more likely to become involved at the school site. Third, by dividing districts into school units, the opportunities

for parent participation are increased, while the scope of education problems considered and the number of people involved at any one meeting are reduced. This makes it easier to respond to parent preferences and increases the chances of each parent to influence school policy. Finally, by involving school level personnel in more decisions, the likelihood of those decisions being effectively implemented is increased.

School Based Management and Equal Educational Opportunity

The idea that decentralized decision making will improve educational quality needs to be developed further, however, because it seems to contradict much conventional wisdom about public education. For example, most people believe that education is supposed to equalize the opportunities of children from poor and minority families and thereby improve educational quality. A more centralized organization of public education, or any public service for that matter, reduces the disparity among services provided by individual units. If communities begin with unequal resources, only centralized action can substantially reduce the inequalities.

Providing equal educational opportunity has been the major reason behind many of the actions centralizing school administration, including school finance reform, standardized curriculum, integration, and statewide assessment. However, a combination of technical changes (particularly the automobile which has broken the tie between one's place of work and one's residence) and school policies (which limit a child's school attendance to the neighborhood school) have conspired to reduce the state's ability to equalize educational opportunity. With families sorting themselves out residentially along income and racial lines and with schools tied to residence, the ideal of a common school providing a cross section of children with a uniform education has been lost

We now have a range of publicly supported schools from wealthy suburban schools catering to the children of high income white parents to poor urban schools for predominately minority students. Perhaps this residential segregation of schools makes no difference. Most observers believe it does. As James Coleman points out, "Even if children don't learn from one another and through competing with one another (which is unlikely), the teacher must teach to the level of the class, making a child's learning dependent on others in his class. Parents, children, and school staff recognize this: a school is regarded as a "good school" or "bad school" more on the basis of its student body than anything else."*

In the past ten years there have been numerous attempts to correct the inequalities resulting from economic and racial segregation of schools. The most direct effort has been to use school busing to break the link between residential segregation and school attendance. Even if the ideal of a common school could be achieved by busing, which seems unlikely because of serious economic and political obstacles, one still needs to ask whether true equality of opportunity would result. A uniform, common curriculum probably does not provide equal opportunity because students enter schools with widely varying educational experiences and abilities.

School based management is based on another approach to providing equal educational opportunity. It assumes that children in different communities within single school districts have different educational needs and styles. By permitting those people closest to these communities--parents and teachers--to make more of the educational policy decisions affecting a particular school, it is hoped those particular educational needs and styles

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*James S. Coleman, "Introduction: Choice of American Education," Parents, Teachers, & Children (San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1977), p.4.

can be better served. School based management, in other words, encourages school program diversity so as to promote equality of educational outcomes rather than inputs. Without programs tailored to serve individual students or groups of students, it is difficult to accomplish anything more than superficial dollar equality among schools and students in a district.

School Based Management and Efficiency

For many years it was felt that schools could be run more efficiently if their administration was centralized. The overall quality of education would be improved because less money would be spent on administration and more could be allocated to educational instruction. Centralization has not appreciably increased the efficiency of schools, however. Most research on the subject indicates that there are few economies realized once a district has grown to a few thousand students. In fact, there appears to be increased spending associated with size as the per pupil costs of administration tend to be much higher in large districts than in medium and small ones.

Proponents of school based management have their own view of efficiency in education. They see efficiency in terms of matching available resources with the educational needs of children in schools. While centralized administration provides uniform service for its members, this is efficient only if the preferences and need of individuals being served are similar. If they are different, however, then centralized provision may be inefficient. Decentralized units of government, on the other hand, can provide a variety of service levels to match the preferences of a particular community. Decentralized government thus offers the prospect of increased efficiency by providing a greater range of services which are more likely to match the skills and interest of teachers with the educational preferences and

requirements of particular students--even though there may be small increases in administrative costs.

Efficiency may also be enhanced in decentralized units because expenditure decisions are more likely to be made by the same people paying for them. If a school district has to pay for the construction of a new school, it is more likely to consider carefully the costs and benefits of the new building than if construction money is provided by state or federal governments. If school personnel have to pay for utilities, they have an added incentive to conserve energy.

School Based Management and Administrative Feasibility

One of the most persistent complaints about school based management is that it is impractical given the many state and federal regulations affecting public education and the constitutional requirements of a uniform education. Collective bargaining, federal comparability requirements, the legal responsibility of school board members, and numerous other state laws all require, critics claim, a strong, centrally operated school district. Implicit in the argument is the notion that only a centrally run school administration can effectively implement the provisions of the many federal, state, and district regulations.

Proponents of school based management point out that increasing centralization of school districts over the past 30 years apparently has not substantially improved the implementation of federal, state or district regulations. In most states, education codes or laws are frequently ignored at the local level. Schools seem to go on operating much as they always have regardless of larger central administrations and legislation designed to change education. In fact, one of the arguments used by the proponents of collective

bargaining is that state regulations are not enforced, and only contracts negotiated and monitored by teachers' unions can protect the interests of teachers and insure educational quality for students.

A major difference between supporters of a strong central administration and supporters of school based management is their understanding of how educational organizations actually operate. Most professional administrators equate educational organizations with business organizations. In business organizations, policies are made at the top and passed down the organizational hierarchy to be administered by employees at the service level of the organization. The linkages between levels of organization are well understood, making it relatively easy to control the behavior of employees at each descending level. If translated to education, this type of organization would mean that legislative actions are translated into rules and regulations by the Department of Education. District superintendents would then ensure that the intentions of the Legislature as interpreted by the Department of Education are carried out at the school building level. Principals would receive orders from the superintendent and in turn give orders to classroom teachers who would willingly comply with them.

Proponents of school based management are likely to see a quite different kind of organization when they look at public schools. Rather than seeing a neatly hierarchical organization, with clear linkages between each level of the organization, they view educational organizations as loosely structured with little control exercised between levels of the organization. Each subunit of education, in their view, is surprisingly autonomous. Each chooses whether to comply with the regulations and rules established at the level above. The Department of Education implements those aspects of legislation they support and frequently ignores other legislatives mandates. District

superintendents can with virtual impunity choose to ignore state regulations. School principals may or may not follow board policy. And classroom teachers can do almost anything they want once the classroom door has been shut.

Many educational statutes over the past 20 years have been designed to tighten up educational administration. School district consolidation was purported to be a means of providing a more uniform school program and of providing education more efficiently. It was supposed to give educators more control over curriculum and spending. New statutes designed to give state officials more control over education have swollen state education codes. Despite these efforts, school districts and school level personnel remain remarkably immune from centralized control yet increasingly frustrated by the paperwork and effort required to meet the formalistic requirements of higher level administrators.

If educational organizations are as loosely structured as the proponents of school based management believe, then school based management is not only a practical way to administer schools but may be the only way. If school principals and classroom teachers can do pretty much as they please, then the only way to bring about educational change is to gain their voluntary compliance with the proposed changes. The failures of so much educational reform legislation can be traced to the resistance of those educators who must ultimately implement the reforms, but who have not participated in either defining the problem or designing the solutions. Thus, many reforms are seen by local people as irrelevant to their problems or off-target in terms of a feasible solution. School based management is a system of shared decision making in which principals, teachers, and parents all have a part in making decisions they are ultimately responsible for implementing. By participating in the decision-making process they learn why the decision was made and also

have a personal stake in seeing that the decision is carried out effectively. Decentralized decision making, in other words, may be a necessary condition for effective implementation of policy in loosely structured organizations.

Summary

Determining the appropriate size of political units or the appropriate balance between centralized and decentralized decision making is one of the most frequently recurring issues in the theory of democracy. Political scientist Robert Dahl has written that determination of the optimal size of democratic political units involves an inescapable dilemma.* The larger government is, the more it can regulate those aspects of the environment its citizens want regulated. The larger the unit, however, and the more complicated its machinery, the less its citizens can participate in its decision. Conversely, the smaller the unit, the greater the chance for citizen participation, but the more limited its range of control over the environment. In centralized government, citizen participation is minimal; in decentralized government citizen participation runs the risk of being trivial. School based management confronts this dilemma by attempting to combine the best aspects of centralized and decentralized decision making. Its major insight is to recognize the immediate and important relationship between parent and teacher involvement in the education of an individual child and the quality of education that child receives. Without that intimate and caring educational environment, the political and economic advantages of centralized administration, if there are any, produce few educational benefits. Consequently, proponents of school based management are willing to sacrifice some of the control

*Robert A. Dahl, "The City in the Future of Democracy," American Political Science Review, 61 (December 1967), 953-70.

implicit in centralization for more effective implementation of educational programs through greater participation and involvement in planning at the site level.

In sum, school based management is not a new management technique; it deals with the perennial problem of balancing centralized management and decentralized decision making; and its intent is to improve the educational opportunities or quality of education received by the children of Florida.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL BASED MANAGEMENT IN FLORIDA

Although school based management provided the underlying rationale for the recommendations of the 1971-72 Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education, legislation arising from those recommendations did not require school districts to decentralize decision making to the school site. Instead legislation was enacted which provided a structure making it possible for districts to decentralize decision making. Specifically, legislation establishing a pupil weighting approach for distributing state school aid, a statewide student assessment program, a management information system, and a new accountability system all made the individual student the primary unit of attention. The focus of educational policy, in other words, was shifted from the district to the student in a particular school. By doing so, it became possible to delegate many aspects of educational decision making to school centers. The question is whether this indirect approach to decentralization has been effective.

In general, the implementation of the Governor's Committee's strategy of educational reform has been only partially effective. Two districts have fully implemented school based management and others have adopted parts of such a system. In a vast majority of Florida school districts there is not

a system of planning, budgeting and decision making which emphasizes school centers as the principal management unit.

There is, however, more school based management in Florida school districts than many legislators and state department officials led us to expect. In part this is because many districts have always delegated some decision-making responsibilities to school personnel. For example, recruitment of staff, assignment of staff, program planning, parent participation, and the allocation of supplies and equipment funds have frequently occurred at the school level. Shared decision making between central office and school officials is also just good management. Some decisions simply can be made more efficiently and effectively by school principals than by the central administrative staff. School based management has also spread because schools are required by state law to perform a variety of managerial functions, from generating FTE counts, to providing for the new cost accounting system, to preparing annual reports of school progress. The idea has also caught on because of efforts of the legislature, State Department of Education and a few districts which have tried and popularized the concept.

Furthermore, there is some evidence of increasing pressure for school centered decision making (school based management) particularly in medium and large school districts. These pressures have little to do with the recommendations of the Citizens' Committee or subsequent actions of the Legislature. They arise from concerns of parents about the quality of public education and demands that they have more input into decisions affecting their children's educations. Teachers are also demanding a stronger voice in decisions affecting curriculum and working conditions. Classroom teachers have been generally left out of the decision-making process yet are the first to be

blamed for school failures. If they are going to be held accountable they want more control over policies affecting their classrooms. Finally, the public no longer believes that school problems can be solved simply by spending more money. Improving the educational performance of children requires more competent and committed teachers and more parental support and participation in the education of children. All of these factors tend to force decisions down to the school level. There are, in other words, social forces pushing school administrators in the direction of more shared, school centered decision making.

The remainder of this paper will attempt to summarize the components of Florida's educational reforms that have been successful and those factors which have inhibited a shift of decision making to the local school site.

The Florida Educational Finance Program

The most successful component of Florida's reform efforts has been its new school finance law. The FEFP has redirected the flow of educational resources in a manner that recognizes the educational needs of individual students. It has been highly equalizing for most districts with regard to both expenditures and services. The pupil weighting system has equalized educational opportunity by directing more resources to students requiring high cost educational programs.

There are seven key elements in funding Florida's schools:*

1. A required local millage rate: in 1977-78 this is 6.4 mills.
2. Local discretionary authority to levy from 0 to 1.6 additional mills beyond the required 6.4 without voter approval: the required 6.4

*This description of the Florida Educational Finance Program was prepared by Robert Goettel and reported in Improving Education in Florida: A Reassessment, a report prepared for the Select Joint Committee on Public Schools of the Florida Legislature, February 1978.

mills is 80 percent of the 8.0 mill statutory limit established by the Legislature; only one of the 67 districts has exceeded by voter approval that 8.0 mill limit: Palm Beach by 1.6 mills for two years. The Constitutional tax limit is 10 mills.

3. A system of calculating full time equivalent pupils (FTE): in grades 1-3 an FTE student must be enrolled in a program or combination of programs not less than 20 net instructional hours each week; in grades 4-12 not less than 25 instructional hours; districts do not receive extra FEFP funds when student instructional hours exceed these amounts.

4. A base student allocation per weighted FTE pupil provided from state and required local resources combined: in 1977-78 this is $827 per FTE in grades 4-9, the instructional area with a base program weight of 1.0.

5. A system of 26 educational program weights designed to transfer resources to pupils according to their needs. Of these weights, there are 3 in the K-12 basic program area; 16 in the Exceptional Child program area; 6 in Vocational Education; and 1 in Adult and Basic Education. For example, the program weight for grades K-3 is 1.234 compared to 1.00 in grades 4-9. Therefore, an FTE in K-3 is counted .234 more than an FTE in 4-9 for the purposes of determining each district's FEFP allocation.

6. A district cost differential adjustment based on an annual "cost of living" survey: in 1977-78 the adjustment factors applied to FEFP funds range from .9284 to 1.0665.

7. Availability of supplemental funds from (1) race track revenues allocated in equal amounts to counties, (2) national and state forest reserve revenues, (3) the federal government's Impact Aid program (P.L. 874), and (4) mobile home tax: such funds are available to many districts in addition to or in place of levied additional millage which helps support programs (such as transportation) and local preferences not totally covered by the FEFP or categorical state aid; in 1975-76 these "other" funds ranged from a low of $1 to a high of $216 per weighted full time equivalent pupil with half the districts in the $1-$15 range.

Perhaps the most important component of the FEFP is the way that the base student allocation is treated in relation to the number of weighted full time equivalent pupils (WFTE) in each district. The 1977-78 base student allocation ($827) functions as a program amount totally independent of the local contribution. That is, school districts have $827 per weighted FTE (adjusted by the district cost differential factor) no matter how much local revenue they raise.

Besides its effects on the equity and efficiency of the Florida school finance system, the system of calculating full time equivalent pupils required an accounting and budgeting system which details information at the school level. Principals, teachers and parents can compute the exact amount of state and local money generated by students at each school and can demand that those monies be spent for their intended purposes. The FEFP has constrained the ability of district officials to manipulate budget allocations by requiring that dollars generated at each school be spent, in large part, at the school level. This technical requirement of the FEFP has done as much, in other words, to promote school based management as any other aspect of

Florida's educational reform legislation.

Citizen Participation*

Another important component of the 1973 Governor's Citizens' Committee recommendations was that each school should have a school advisory committee consisting of parents, citizens and teachers to work with school principals on the development of school budgets, curriculum, and personnel policies. The Governor's Committee also recommended that each school prepare and annual report of school progress to inform the school community of activities, achievements, and problems at the school. Provisions for both advisory councils and annual reports of school progress were written into legislation in 1973.

Since that time the number of school districts in Florida with individual school advisory committees has grown steadily from 29 (43%) in 1974 to 47 (70%) in 1977, with 20 districts (30%) using some combination of a multi-tiered (district-area-school) structure. This represents a large increase in the formal mechanisms for citizen participation. There is some evidence that the growth of school advisory committees and citizen participation would have been even greater if the advisory committees had been given a stronger policy-making role at the school level. In general, advisory committees are largely controlled by school administrators and their membership unrepresentative of the community as a whole. While some advisory committees are active and have generated enthusiasm and experience among their members, school advisory committees have not become partners in the management of local schools as was intended by the Governor's Citizens' Committee.

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*The analysis of the Advisory Committee in the Florida study was prepared by Miriam Clasby and reported in Improving Education in Florida: A Reassessment, a report prepared for the Select Joint Committee on Public Schools of the Florida Legislature, February 1978.

The weaknesses of school advisory committees in Florida are partly the result of the legislation creating them which was never clearly explained or broadly disseminated and which did not provide resources for supporting or monitoring implementation of the law. Furthermore, implementation of school advisory committees has been slowed by the failure to give the committees any formal power or responsibility, by the isolation of school committee from each other, by the absences of information, training and other support services to enable citizens to carry out their responsibilities for preparing the annual reports of school progress as well as to advise school administrators and teachers, and by resistance from school boards, superintendents and principals to share power with parents and citizens.

The Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education believed that increased parental support and involvement in public schools was essential for improving the quality of public education in the state. So far, the school advisory committees have only begun to provide a structure through which parental support and involvement is possible. The kind of popular control envisioned by the Citizen's Committee has yet to become a reality in Florida.

Impediments to the Implementation of School Based Management

As we have mentioned, school based management has been implemented wholely in only two or three districts and partially in a relatively small number of other districts. This record may be regarded as a success or failure depending upon ones expectations about the pace of organizational change. Instead of expecting reform to occur in a period of three or four years, it may be more realistic to expect a reform as comprehensive as that tried in Florida to take a decade to implement. Regardless of ones perspective, however, there are several lessons to be learned from the Florida experiment about educational reform.

One of the impediments to implementation of school based management in Florida was the failure of the legislature to specifically address the question of the school district's decision-making structure, although much of the legislative activity since 1973 has supported the concept of the school as the primary unit in the delivery of educational services. It was not until 1976, that the legislature included specific language concerning their intent regarding school level decision making. The 1976 Accountability Act directs districts to "emphasize a system of school-based management in which each individual school center becomes the principal planning unit and, eventually, to integrate planning and budgeting at the school level." This belated direction does not, however, specify what is meant by a school based management system, nor are there resources directed to facilitate the development of such a system in local school districts.

A result of the lack of legislative direction was an indifferent response by the Department of Education with regard to implementation of school based management. The Department gave school based management a low priority and used the legislature's silence on the subject as justification for doing as little as possible. There were individual administrators within the Department of Education supporting the concept, but they were unable to develop a consistent and sustained policy regarding implementation.

The lack of action on the part of the legislature and Department of Education to promote or facilitate implementation of school based management can be attributed in part to the failure of the Governor's Committee and the legislative members of that Committee to develop a political base or constituency for the concept. Those groups representing educators who would be required to implement school based management were not involved in the development of the idea or the legislation designed to carry out the idea.

Several statewide educators' organizations, including those whose members would benefit from the strengthening of school level decision making, have come out in opposition to school based management, especially since the advent of collective bargaining.

The lack of strong direction from either the legislature or the State Department of Education, along with the absence of interest group support, left interpretation as to what was expected to the whims and biases of district level administrators. We found that school district personnel in Florida are aware of the legislature's interest in school based management but have a variety of interpretations of the legislature's intentions and the actual meaning of school based management. Interpretations seem to run from very narrow mechanistic definitions with focus on school centered budgeting to more sophisticated definitions which stress parent and community involvement in school based decisions, greater program flexibility, participatory decision making at the school site, principal responsibility and accountability, and decentralized budgeting. And of course there are interpretations which fall in between these two extremes.

The degree of understanding of school based management within a district seems to be related to the interest shown in school based management by the superintendent. If the superintendent is informed about and interested in school based management, principals and teachers in the district are also more likely to be informed and interested. Superintendents clearly set the tone for local debate on the most effective way to manage schools. Without superintendent support for school based management, there is little chance of it being implemented because of the superintendent's control over the flow of information in the district.

Furthermore, school based management is perceived by many educators as being inconsistent with other provisions of Florida School Laws, in particular, state curriculum requirements, the constitutional requirement of a "uniform system of free public schools," public employee collective bargaining, state-wide testing requirements, and regulations specifying the duties and responsibilities of superintendents and school board members. There are several statutory requirements that complicate implementation of school based management. The Title I comparability requires that districts interfere in school-level budgeting decisions. Collective bargaining is a constraint if the unions are opposed to school based management. Individual schools are also poorly equipped to handle state reporting requirements and to keep up with changing state requirements.

For the most part, however, the major impediments to school based management are non-statutory. Rather, some administrators simply believe it is not a good idea. Some of these interpret equal opportunity as meaning a uniform education for all the children in their district. Others are not inclined to share power, believing they can make better and more timely decisions themselves. Other administrators do not understand the rationale for school based management or how to implement such a management scheme if they did. Too few administrators think of school based management as a strategy for educational renewal and see it instead as an unproven management innovation. A further problem arises from the lack of solid evidence that school based management will in fact improve a district's quality of education. Short-term measures of educational performance are unlikely to show dramatic results. It needs to be emphasized that educational improvements will result from the learned skills and abilities that parents, teachers, and principals are likely to acquire by being given greater

responsibility than they previously were given.

Finally, implementation of school based management in Florida has been slow to get going because there has been no vehicle for encouraging districts to move faster. In California, Early Childhood Education, provided a strong monetary incentive for schools to develop plans for improving local school programs. In Florida no such incentive was provided. Instead there were ambiguous exhortations from some political leaders about school based management, citizen participation, and local control, and a number of legal requirements for carrying fiscal and accounting procedures to the school level. Educators, like everyone else, are reluctant to change their behavior unless they perceive there is an advantage in doing so. To get school board members, superintendents, principlas, and teachers to share decision-making responsibilities and to also include parents in the decision-making process requires more than persuasion. State assistance in staff development and grants to local schools where teachers and parents prepare plans for improving educational programs are probably necessary to speed up the process of change in Florida.

Summary

In 1973 Florida embarked on an ambitious adventure to improve the quality of public education by decentralizing many aspects of educational decision making to the school site. The strategy incorporated a comprehensive reform of the state's school finance system, the development of a management information and accounting system, requirements for greater parent and citizen involvement in education, and a relaxation of many state education requirements. The general strategy, which has been labeled school based management, seems to be a reasonable way of dealing with educational problems in the 1970s.

It promotes equal educational opportunity by enabling educators to tailor school programs to the particular educational requirements of individual students. It fosters a more efficient use of funds by insuring that resources are allocated to activities closely related to the pursuit of local educational objectives. Finally, school based management is a practical way of administering school programs given the difficulties of managing classroom activities from district or state offices. Implementation of school based management in Florida has been slowed by the lack of direction from the legislature and the Department of Education, the absence of a strong political base among Florida educators, confusion about its meaning at all levels of education in Florida, and the lack of a vehicle for encouraging school personnel to make the changes envisioned by the reform strategy.